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29th November 1981

Dear David,

The enclosed pages contain my reactions, suggestions etc, to your invitation to comment on the review of the Film Makers on Tour and the Video Artists on Tour Schemes.

I hope they will be of some use to you and that some of the suggestions can somehow be implemented.

Yours,

P. Savage

Peter Savage.

To some extent there seems to be a somewhat ambivalent attitude adopted by the Arts Council with regard to the question of production in relation to exhibition. On the one hand a number of applicants are funded for the production of new work but there is little (in some cases no) provision for the exhibition of that work. Exhibition is seen to be something separate from production. The imminent 'review' of the Film Makers on Tour and the Video Artists on Tour schemes which it seems will involve them becoming 'more selective' would seem to be a step in the wrong direction. Production is useless without exhibition. The argument that the work will, potentially at least, be shown at some future date is questionable. The majority of artists working in film and video (probably most media) usually prefer to show recent work. They are often more ready to engage in discussion about current/recent work referring to their current thinking rather than attempting to reconstruct their previous thinking.

The Film Makers on Tour and the Video Artists on Tour schemes as they stand go some way towards reducing the separation between production and exhibition, and I would maintain that they should remain open to any artists that are within the Council's terms of reference. (I would also like to suggest that the Council make these terms of reference public).

If the schemes must become more selective then selection should include those artists working in Film/Video and related media who are in most need of the support the schemes offer. My own definition of artists most in need of such support would most definitely include the younger generation of film and video artists, these are the people who find the greatest difficulty in persuading venues (with a few exceptions) to host a showing of their work. The artists who are already relatively established could rely on their reputation to be persuasive. I would like to add that any form of selection process from within the Council's terms of reference is, even if unintentionally, bound to be seen as a value judgement by possible venues and effectively will produce an elite core (if that doesn't exist already) who will be shown (because venues will incur less expense if nothing else) and the rest who will rarely be shown, and who will be seen to be aspiring to become part of the elite. I cannot see how such a situation can be desirable.

The stated aims of the schemes (I quote from the Video Artists on Tour introduction) are "to encourage the showing of artists video and to offset some of the costs incurred in the successful presentation of video". There is further reference to encouraging a dialogue between artists and audience for a wider appreciation of the work. Rather than becoming more selective, a further possibility suggests itself: if the Council is serious in these aims for the schemes then some kind of film, video and related media show should be held say twice a year over a two to four week period at one of the Council's London galleries, selected from the work funded in the previous two years. I will go into further detail as to how the shows might be organised later, first I would like to make a few observation that have come up during discussions about such a show.

1. If the Video Artists and Film Makers on Tour schemes must become more selective in a way which will exclude some people who actually work within the Council's terms of reference, then such a show would at least offer some kind of support which would render the funding of production useful - the Council already acknowledges (to some degree at least) its role in exhibition - production is useless without exhibition.

2. Such an exhibition would allow the film and video panel to include other time based audio visual work, most obviously tape/slide and audio visual installation work. This may require administrative co-opting of members of other panels, the main point, however, is that the film and video panel should take the responsibility for what up to now has been seen as hybrid work and therefore "not my responsibility" and passed on - somewhere. I suggest the film and video panel should accept this responsibility principally because there are overlaps both theoretically and practically between these areas and film and video and additionally, because the difficulties of production and exhibition are almost identical in many cases. Further, many film makers and video artists do not restrict themselves to a single medium but often combine their activity in film/video with a wider range of activity, producing work across a whole spectrum of time based media. There also seems to be a problem raised when one can apply for (and presumably get) a grant for the cost of transfer from tape/slide to film or video and consequently use that work within the schemes and yet the work in its original form is unacceptable to either scheme.

3. The proposed shows could be offered as touring exhibitions to regional galleries providing shows throughout the country. Such shows offered by the Council would obviously be more attractive to galleries than individual applications to show, where the equipment and administrative set up is not designed to cope with one day/night shows. A coherent (at least administratively) show is bound to be more attractive initially to galleries than a series of sporadic and often time consuming one off events. As a consequence of touring (potentially at least) some of the aims of the schemes would be fulfilled, encouraging smaller/regional (any!) galleries etc., to stage shows involving film, video and other time based audio visual work in addition to the larger (though not huge) shows toured by the Council. Venues would gain experience and develop an audience for such work through handling the shows 'arranged' by the Council, and consequently would be prepared to try small group/individual shows of a similar nature. This whole process would also encourage a general wider appreciation of film, video and other time based audio visual work.

A further option still available to these venues would be the possibility of inviting exhibitors to introduce/discuss their work in the context of other recent work in the field rather than in the 'vacuum' of one off shows if audiences are not 'well informed'.

4. The money already invested by the Council as both production grants and for its own equipment (not to mention the funding of such bodies as LVA and the Film Co-op for their production facilities) would be more productively used. The shows should not prevent the application by individuals or small groups to borrow equipment etc., or shows they might be able to arrange personally.

The following are points which I suggest should form one side of a debate as to how these shows might be organised and the conditions attached to them. They are a gathering together of suggestions that emerged through discussion with other artists working in time based audio visual media.

1. As a condition of receiving and award from ACGB for production of work, the funding body should request that a new work be submitted for inclusion in an exhibition.

2. This would form the 'pool' from which a show could be selected, (if the panel feel selection is necessary, since they already 'select' at the funding stage, though I can see a need to know what work is going to be shown before the show.)
3. Work funded by the Council would then become available for ONE public exhibition and not remain, as in many cases, seen by only a few people, usually only the film and video panel(?) and in some cases never seen.
4. There should be say two shows a year with an attempt to organise the work into some sort of coherent 'theme' or subdivisions into themes. I suggest two a year so that they will not become unnecessarily large and, as is pointed out in the Video Artists on Tour leaflet, so that they can retain some of the intimacy video screenings tend to have.
5. The bursary/production award should include the artists fee for exhibition for this show only. Any subsequent shows (touring etc.) should be paid for at the agreed rates.
6. Since some work takes a long time to materialise, as in some film projects, work up to two years old should be acceptable and a limit on the amount of production funding made available should be made until work is submitted for exhibition or at the Council's discretion a completion fund made available.

As I have mentioned I consider the above proposals and comments to form one viewpoint in a debate and would finally like to suggest that before any final decisions are taken, some sort of debate should actually take place between the interested parties, allowing the various views to be aired and any objections from any party to be heard and considered. I feel there is only a limited advantage to all concerned if the council invites suggestions which have to be made without any knowledge of the Council's thinking on the matter. I feel that all the current users and perhaps potential users of the two schemes should be included in discussions of how they might operate in the future. I suggest a meeting of those concerned where any differences of opinion and suggestions can be discussed.

Finally I request that the panel please send me a written reply to the suggestions I have made outlining their reservations and objections or the practical difficulties they envisage which would prevent the instigation of any of the proposals.